

**STATEMENT OF**

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**Submitted By**

**Rick Weidman**  
**Director, Government Relations**

**Before The**

**House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health**

**Regarding**

**Health Care of Filipino World War II Veterans within  
the Department of Veterans Affairs**

**June 13, 2002**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Filner, and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is pleased to appear here today in support of amending title 38, United States Code which would improve benefits for Filipino veterans of World War II and their surviving spouses.

Before I begin my testimony I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Filipino veterans who are here today a Happy Independence Day. It was 104 years ago yesterday on June 12, 1898, when the country was finally freed from the bondage of Spanish colonial rule, which lasted almost four centuries.

Mr. Chairman, VVA strongly believes that those brave Filipino veterans of World War II who were drafted into service by President Franklin D. Roosevelt over sixty years ago are entitled to benefits that they were promised.

Under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, these Filipino soldiers fought side-by-side with forces from the United States mainland, defending the American flag in the now-famous battles of Bataan and Corrigidor. Thousands of Filipino prisoners died, both on the Bataan death March and in prisoner of war camps. The Philippines endured four long years of occupation, and after its liberation, the United States used the strategically located Commonwealth as a base from which to launch the final efforts to win the war.

With the vital participation of Filipino soldiers so evident, VVA finds it hard to believe that, soon after the war ended, the Congress of 1946 unceremoniously deprived many of the Filipino veterans of benefits and veterans' status. Prior to enactment of the "Rescission Act" on February 18, 1946, Filipino veterans were considered veterans by VA law.

Congress has an opportunity at this hearing today to correct a wrong that was perpetuated on these brave veterans almost sixty years ago. During World War II, Filipino nationals were called into military service by Executive Order of the President and fought valiantly under U.S. command to help achieve peace and freedom in the Pacific. After the war, the United States made grants to the Philippine government to provide for the needs of these veterans. In addition, some are eligible for benefits under the United States veterans system. However, many of these deserving veterans living in the United States are currently not eligible for such benefits.

VVA recognizes the leadership of this Committee to ensure that these brave men who served at our side as staunch allies are treated properly today, correcting a wrong done in 1946. VVA particularly thanks and commends the Honorable Bob Filner, who has been tenaciously pursuing this issue for several years. His strong leadership and hard work helped us arrive at this hearing today.

VVA would also like to take this opportunity to commend U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi on his two-day trip this past April to the Philippines. The visit was notable as the first visit to the Philippines of a U.S. Cabinet official under the administration of President George W. Bush and as the first-ever official visit of a

Veterans Affairs Secretary to this country, where Filipino and American soldiers fought shoulder-to-shoulder in World War II.

Noting the U.S. debt to Filipino veterans of World War II, the Secretary began his official visit with a trip to Corregidor, where he lauded “the heroic Filipino men and women who sacrificed so much to liberate their beloved country and who helped the allies emerge victorious from World War II.” He noted that the 60th anniversary of the infamous Bataan Death March was recently observed in both countries and praised the Philippines for the “extraordinarily fruitful contributions” it has been making to the international war on terrorism.

During his round of meetings in Manila, Secretary Principi met with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and thanked her for the Philippine government’s support in the global war against terrorism. He also pledged to work with the U.S. Congress on expanded eligibility for VA healthcare and increased benefits for Filipino veterans and for the restoration of a grant in the form of medical equipment for the Veterans Memorial Medical Center (VMMC) in Quezon City. The visiting American official also met with the Administrator of the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office, Commodore Artemio Arugay, and with representatives of veterans’ groups.

The Secretary also laid a wreath at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, met with U.S. Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone and other Embassy Officials and paid a call on the officers and 200 Filipino employees of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs’ Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic, where he inspected the operation of the Department’s sole overseas office.

The Manila Office dispenses each month over \$11 million dollars in benefits to eligible veterans and an additional \$8 million monthly in Social Security benefits. More than 5,000 veterans living in the Philippines receive compensation from this office, and nearly 1,000 more receive pension benefits. An additional 6,300 dependents of eligible veterans receive dependency and indemnity compensation, and another 3,300 receive death pensions.

In formal remarks at an April 16 luncheon jointly hosted by the U.S. Veterans Affairs Office and the Veterans Federation of the Philippines in Manila, Secretary Principi cited efforts in the United States to significantly expand the kinds of benefits offered to Filipino veterans of World War II. He noted that in 1999, the U.S. Congress offered a special Social Security benefit to Filipino veterans of World War II and allowed eligible veterans to return to the Philippines and retain 75 percent of that benefit.

In 2000, Commonwealth Army veterans and veterans of Recognized Guerilla Forces were offered veterans disability compensation at the full statutory rate if they are permanent legal residents of the United States. Other veterans became eligible to receive VA health care if they are permanent U.S. residents receiving disability compensation from the VA Department. Also in 2000, Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrilla veterans became eligible to be buried in VA national cemeteries if they were permanent residents of the U.S. at the time of their deaths.

Secretary Principi acknowledged that there are other VA benefits for which Filipino veterans and their families -- in the Philippines and in the U.S. -- would like to be eligible. He stated that the U.S. Congress has several proposals now under consideration, noting that should these become law, they will be implemented "promptly, efficiently, and effectively."

In 1990 a law was passed awarding citizenship to Filipinos who had fought on the side of the United States in World War II. As a result of that legislation, about 26,000 aging veterans were naturalized as US citizens. But there was nothing in the legislation about veterans benefits. The new citizens, if they were poor, were eligible only for welfare payments on the same basis as non-veterans.

VVA believes the passage of the U.S. Rescission Act of 1946, which stated that military work of Filipino soldiers, scouts and guerrillas was not considered active service in the U.S. armed forces, was incorrect and this proposed legislation will address some of the flaws in that law.

Mr. Chairman, the long struggle staged by Filipino veterans demanding equity in their treatment by the United States has gone on for more than half a century. VVA strongly believes because of the aging population of the Filipino veterans there is an urgent need for this legislation. These aging Filipino soldiers who fought under the US flag in World War II must be helped now, when it matters most, before they all die.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the testimony of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). I will be more than happy to answer any question that the committee may have.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Funding Statement**  
**June 13, 2002**

The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

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## RICHARD WEIDMAN

Richard F. “Rick” Weidman serves as Director of Government Relations on the National Staff of Vietnam Veterans of America. As such, he is the primary spokesperson for VVA in Washington. He served as a 1-A-O Army Medical Corpsman during the Vietnam war, including service with Company C, 23<sup>rd</sup> Med, AMERICAL Division, located in I Corps of Vietnam in 1969.

Mr. Weidman was part of the staff of VVA from 1979 to 1987, serving variously as Membership Service Director, Agency Liaison, and Director of Government Relations. He left VVA to serve in the Administration of Governor Mario M. Cuomo (NY) as statewide director of veterans employment & training (State Veterans Programs Administrator) for the New York State Department of Labor.

He has served as Consultant on Legislative Affairs to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), and served at various times on the VA Readadjustment Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Labor’s Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment & Training, the President’s Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities - Subcommittee on Disabled Veterans, Advisory Committee on veterans’ entrepreneurship at the Small Business Administration, and numerous other advocacy posts in veteran affairs.

Mr. Weidman was an instructor and administrator at Johnson State College (Vermont) in the 1970s, where he was also active in community and veterans affairs. He attended Colgate University (B.A., (1967), and did graduate study at the University of Vermont.

He is married and has four children.